

Rev 26-01-11a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 11th of January, 2026. We're continuing our study in the book of Revelation.

We are in the midst of the seven seals of chapter six. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and investigation and we'll begin. Father, we are grateful for this portion of your word.

We thank you for the promises we have, the security we have in the Lord Jesus. We thank you for his example of faithfulness and obedience. We thank you that we have been uniquely granted to him as a gift and the place we occupy in your plan is unique and we hope to exploit that potential and make the most of that opportunity in the days that remain to us in this life.

I pray that the scripture we look at this morning will contribute to that goal so that each one of us can be renewed in our hearts and minds and be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Most famous passage perhaps outside of John 3.16 is the four horsemen of the apocalypse in the Revelation.

And we have seen the Lord Jesus who has been declared worthy to open these seals and to read the book. It fascinates me that there is no indication of access to the contents of the scroll at this point because the scroll cannot be opened until all of the seals have been lifted. There really isn't a way to seal a scroll so that as you break one seal, you can read a part of it and so on.

If these were internal and you unrolled a portion and encountered a seal, John would not be able to see that there are seven seals. No one would know the number until it was fully unrolled. So this is a scroll and on the outside edge are seven seals that prevent it from being opened and read.

It is written both on the inside, which is an assumption at this point because only the outside is visible in the preceding chapter. And it is written on the outside and the outside writing is as we have seen an indication of qualification. This scroll is only to be opened by someone with the qualifications who is worthy and the lamb as it had been slain is.

So John says in chapter six, when the lamb opened one of the seals, I heard one of the four living creatures. And we've seen there is a direct numerical correspondence between these living creatures, the face aspect or attribute that they represent and the contents that follow the opening of the seal so that when the lamb opened the first of the seals and the first of the living creatures says with a loud voice like thunder, come. If you haven't by now, be sure you scratch out and see.

He's not talking to John. I looked and behold a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow, a crown was given to him and he went out conquering and to conquer.

We've seen this in detail. A point to remember as we move forward this morning is when the first seal is opened, a living creature closest in proximity to God on his throne calls out a command to come and there is action on earth. Horses and horsemen gallop.

I always think of the old radio shows and even later sound men, when they wanted to depict someone galloping on a horse, they had coconut shells cut in half and a little tray of dirt. And they would cluck cluck cluck cluck or clack them together to simulate the sound of horses hooves. But horses gallop on the ground.

There was a famous horse that was so fast that people believed it could fly. And the high-speed photography was invented in part by a man who wanted to use it at the racetrack to document this horse's hooves. And ever since then, winning by a nose and this high-speed photography at racetracks began with the notion that this one horse was so fast that his feet were barely touching the ground or not touching at all at certain points in the race.

But they're groundlings, they are on earth. And so the seal, this is a seal made of wax. It is sealing a scroll, no doubt, representatively speaking, of papyrus.

These are earthly materials. This is all on the earth. The perspective is what happens on earth as each of these phases unfolds.

It is at God's behest, as we have seen. Those closest to God who hear his voice first, as it were, are the living creatures. And they speak for God in many cases.

There is structure, there is delegated action. God doesn't speak the opening of the seals himself. There is authorization.

And the first living creature issues a command and action takes place on earth. And this is important for us to remember because the things that happen on earth are either initiated by God or allowed by God. And we will see both kinds of things, both in revelation and in our own lives.

There are things that God actively brings into our lives for blessing, for challenge, for reinforcement of things that we have learned. And we should remember that these are the story problems that test how well we have paid attention to God's word, how amenable we are to the influence of God's spirit. And if we're distractible, if we're busy, if we are preoccupied, if we are self-centered, if we are subjective, we are going to miss the fact that God is initiating, God is supervising.

The things that he does not initiate, he super intends. And it is important for us as we see these prophetic words of scripture to connect them to our lives, our existence. We are those to whom this book is addressed.

And because we won't be here, it isn't to tell us what to get ready for on the earth. It is just like the Old Testament scriptures that talk about the earlier parts of the age of Israel written for our

instruction so that we can observe, interpret, and apply. So this is a foreboding scene.

This is a voice like thunder. This is not joy and celebration at the repentance of a sinner, as Jesus will describe. This is not the songs of praise and the scenes of thanksgiving that we've seen in the preceding context.

On earth, this is the introduction of dark times of judgment. But notice the command is issued to come and the first horse with its rider appears. And we've looked at this in detail.

White horse, he who sat on it with a bow. This is the threat of force from a distance. If you see archers on the wall, you know not to get too close.

This is someone who has the ability to project power from a distance. In our times, you think of cruise missiles and intercontinental ballistic missiles and the kinds of things that are on submarines and on aircraft and are launched from remote locations. And it is leverage.

It is the ability to threaten and to deter reaction or opposition because of the possession of weaponry that strikes at a distance. That's what a bow represents. Don't even need to see the arrow.

It reminds me of those who know that we have these missiles that can travel the world or we have cruise missiles on board ships. You don't see them. They're hidden in launchers.

They're in the bowels of the ship. They're under the surface of the sea in submarines. They're in aircraft that you can't see in the sky, but they are there.

And if you see the launch platform, you know that the sharp point of the weapon is with it. So you see this bow. And by sort of a biblical pun, I think this word, which as I mentioned last time, the word bow is also used for God's bow in the sky, which is a sign of covenant.

God put his bow in the sky. Never again will I destroy the earth with a flood. There's going to be widespread destruction, but it isn't going to come from a water event.

In fact, it'll be something of the opposite. But there is the hint here that perhaps the covenant that is made with the many for one week that Daniel speaks of in chapter nine of his book may be alluded to here indirectly. That he, because he is strong and has the ability to project force, people are going to want to make treaties.

And we see this happening in our present day with agreements being reached because of the threat of consequences if a covenant is not entered into by those that are at a distance. See it happening in our own government. And the crown which is given to him is the conqueror's crown.

This is the Stephanos. It's not the diadem. He has some accomplishment for which he is rewarded.

People talk about peace prizes or accolades or requests that someone lead an organization or join the board of an influential entity because of their accomplishments. And they are fated, they are appreciated, they are respected, and they are given authority based on accomplishments. And those previous accomplishments underscore and undergird this notion that this guy can hurt you if you don't go along to get along.

That was the first seal. The lamb as it had been slain is not really pictured by John as these seals unfold. It says, when he had opened the seal.

You could imagine Hollywood redoing this scene where there is a great deal made of the lamb reaching down and opening a seal and sound effects and flashes of light and so on. John does not direct our gaze toward the lamb. The focus is on the results of the seal coming off of the scroll.

And it seems as though there is a closeup here and all we see is the seal. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature. This is how we know that they align.

Come and see another horse, fiery red, went out and it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth. And you remember, these are in order. The lion was the first one mentioned back when the living creatures were described in chapter four, verse seven.

The first living creature was like a lion. So this is suzerainty. This is rule and control.

And he calls for a similar or corresponding horseman to come forth or to be allowed to come forth, come on out. And the horseman is evidently prepared because he's got his bow, he's given the crown and he's ready to ride. And this seems to be the first phase of the coming world leaders program.

When that which restrains is taken out of the way and the church has already left the earth. Now it is the time. And in the same way that God called for the Assyrians, God called for the Babylonians.

At various times, God called for the enemies of Israel to come forth and to be a means of judgment. That seems to be happening here. In verse seven of chapter four, the second living creature was like a calf or an ox.

And now we have the blood red horse. And this speaks of the atoning sacrifice represented by the Levitical system. You have the whole burnt offering, you have the ox tied to the horns of the altar and so on.

But when that sacrifice, that substitutionary atonement is rejected, people's blood is on their own heads and it is their own blood that will be spilled. And so you have warfare. And when the second living creature says, come fiery red horse, and it is granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth and that they should kill one another, and there was given to him a great sword.

These are metaphors. There are not four coming world rulers. There are not four beasts or antichrists as it were.

But these riders, I think, represent facets or aspects of the coming world government. And this is policy as it were, that comes forth. And when peace through strength and leverage fails, now there is going to be military force.

There is going to be the sword and there's going to be the spilling of blood. I mentioned last time, it is a detail to note that when the Lord Jesus rules in the millennial kingdom, He doesn't have a sword. When people are aberrant or disobedient or uncompliant, He has a rod of iron with which He shatters them.

He doesn't have to slay them. He breaks up their unity. He fragments their cohesion.

And we don't see warfare and bloodshed to implement the policies of the peaceable kingdom. The Lord Jesus is able to use other means. It reminds you of Solomon who was able to avail himself of the victories that his father won and he can adjudicate and rule in peace.

Shlomo, his very name is Shalom. Shalom. But this is the second living creature representing God's requirement in justice.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. Why? There is so much talk today about why does God have to be so bloody? Canaanites are being slain and women and children and animals as Joshua and the Israelites entered the land and God desires and demands these bloody sacrifices. And there's just blood everywhere.

And what happened to the gentle Jesus and peace and a child on the knee and field of daisies. And Jesus never judged anyone and Jesus never spilled any blood when He came. And all of this blood and warfare and harshness and violence is very ungodlike.

I think that's not inspired. I think people misunderstood God and what His plan was. Why violent death? Why bloodshed? Why sacrifice? Why does it require the taking of the life of an animal that is not guilty? It is to impress upon us that sin is not a small thing.

It's not a light misunderstanding or a momentary failure. Sin is serious. Sin is a metastasizing, spreading malignancy.

It is destructive. It cannot be allowed to exist for more than a season or it will destroy everything around it. It is a disconnection from the life of God.

And people think sin is no big deal. To tell a lie, to deceive, to break faith, to violate God's ordinances, His instructions, what He requires of us in terms of faithfulness and obedience, even when those commands are arbitrary, don't work on Saturdays. Is there some moral harm done when a man goes out and his fire is running low and he needs to go get more firewood? And so it's Saturday right after Moses brings the tables of the law down and communicates

them and says, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Don't do any work on that day. It's arbitrary. God said, I picked the seventh day and rested.

You will rest on the seventh day. Many of the ordinances, regulations and requirements of the law of Moses are not grounded in moral righteousness or the prevention of moral turpitude. They are designed to set a standard and test faithfulness and obedience when there doesn't seem to be a rhyme or reason to it.

And the consequence of violating God's instruction, however we view its necessity or its relative righteousness, it is obedience for obedience sake. And to not obey, to disobey, to violate, to in some cases rebel against God's authority is a death penalty offense. When sin exists, death follows.

It is sin separates us from God. It can go to the story of the garden. So when warfare comes and bloodshed, it is because the peace of God that is being counterfeited by the rider on the white horse has been rejected.

The atonement that God offers has been rejected. And so there is now bloodshed in its place. The coming world ruler, the beast called the Antichrist, although not in this book, is a counterfeit.

He is a counterfeit Christ. That's why he's called the antichrist, the instead of Christ. And he offers a peace that can't last.

He offers an atonement that leaves death in its wake and he doesn't have the power of resurrection. So when he opens the third seal in verse five, the third living creature says, come, I looked and behold a black horse. Black is the color of necrosis, of advanced decay, plants and animals.

It is the color of night and of darkness, lack of light, lack of hope. When someone is in a black mood, we figure they are in despair. Black is not a hopeful color.

The saints don't all appear in heaven. They don't accompany the Lord Jesus on black horses with black robes. And you will notice that those who embrace oppositional cultural means and standards and appearances, goth people, for example, they want to dress in black.

Witches are traditionally pictured in black, black robe, black dress, black hat, black coat. Black is associated with darkness and the prince of darkness. And people who want to blacken themselves and blacken things around them are making a statement about their relationship to light.

And when men love darkness rather than light, it is because their deeds are evil. So this writer has a pair of scales in his hand. Notice once again, the writer is writing on the earth.

There is a false piece on the earth. There is a failure for that piece to hold and there is

bloodshed and a sword on the earth. Now there is economic hardship on the earth.

It is measured, it is limited. It is said that when it speaks of the wheat and barley, these are cereal crops and are easily affected by drought. By bad land management, by poor governmental policies.

You can run farmers out of business. It doesn't indicate that there is a drought at this point, but there is famine. And because of the scales in the writer's hand, this appears to be famine due to governmental abuse or mismanagement.

And the voice of the lamb comes from the midst of famine. Of the living creatures and says, there is going to be scarcity of wheat and scarcity of barley, but do not harm the oil and the wine. Olives come from olive trees.

Wine comes from grape vines. These are hardier plants. They will continue to live and bear fruit when cereal crops in large fields are not sustainable.

And this is an indication that the Lord Jesus as the lamb is in control of this process. And this is a famine that is limited. They're not out of cereal.

It's just very high price. They're not out of oil and wine. It is still available for those who can afford it, but it is not harmed.

That's the third seal. The fourth, when he opens it, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature in verse seven, say, come. I looked and behold a green horse, a kloros horse.

This is the pallor of those who are in the grip of serious disease, sickness. The name of him who sat on it was Death and Hades followed with him. You don't see death, even though the black horse, this is foreboding, this is darkness, this is a lack of hope and lack of light, but we don't see death.

We saw death in the second seal with the sword and with bloodshed, which follows an unsustainable effort at peace. Now there is death from sickness and disease that follows an unsustainable attempt to run an economy, a world economy. First seal, we're going to try to go along to get along.

Everybody be at peace. It doesn't work. Bloodshed follows.

Third seal, we're going to control the economy on our own principles and we're going to ration. We're going to weigh things in scales. We're going to do price fixing and so on.

It doesn't work. And as a result, there's famine and death. So, and Hades follows with him.

Hades is not a hopeful place either. David is thankful that God will not leave his soul in Hades when he dies. Power was given to them over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

When the economy fails, you can imagine the violent taking of what people think they need. Roving gangs going from house to house or neighborhood to neighborhood, breaking in, leaving people with nothing. This is pictured in history.

You look at Sherman's March to the Sea, where if you're not killed, you're left with nothing and you die slowly of starvation and disease. That brings us now this morning to verse nine and notice that these A are on the earth. This is horsemen and horses and consequences on the earth.

And it is brought about by human agency. Human agency creates these problems. There is an effort to do things in human strength, human wisdom, human ingenuity.

It fails and there is human hardship, suffering, bloodshed, and death. They are a unit. These four are of a piece.

They are four aspects of a single implementation of human effort to have a substitute millennial kingdom with a substitute king. Now we come to the fifth seal and there is a break. We don't have another horse.

We don't have another horseman. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, "until you judge and avenge our blood "on those who dwell on the earth." You can circle the word Lord there in verse 10.

If you have kept an eye on the Greek in the New Testament long enough, you know that when you see the word Lord, it's Adonai. Adonai. That's not the word here.

This is, and of course you have both Hebrew and Greek at work, and so much of this is harking back to the Old Testament. And in addition to Adonai in Greek, we have Rabboni is a late, development in that culture and in that language that is addressed to the Lord Jesus a time or two. But what's interesting here is, this is not the normal Greek word for Lord.

This is despotes, where we get the word despot. Despot. Despotes.

This is not looking at divine authority or divine identity. This is looking at divine power. And I could give you, I did a word study on this, but I'm not going to divert into it, except to tell you that the result of that, you can go to, we'll go one place because it occurs in the Septuagint of Job.

So turn back to Job chapter five. This is a wonderful explication of this term. And we'll come to understand why these martyrs use it.

Job chapter five, beginning at verse eight. As for me, I would seek God and to God, I would commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.

He gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields.

He sets on high those who are lowly and those who mourn are lifted to safety. He frustrates the devices of the crafty so that their hands cannot carry out their plans. He catches the wise in their own craftiness and the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them.

They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noontime as in the night, but he saves the needy from the sword, from the mouth of the mighty and from their hand. So the poor have hope and injustice shuts her mouth. And verse eight, as for me, I would seek God and to God I would commit my cause.

They use despotes there. It is used of masters of the house in Jesus parables. And it is an allusion to someone who has power, ruling power for adjudication, for justice.

And so these souls under the altar are appealing. How long O despotes, O almighty one, holy and true until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth. Once again, fifth seal, the focus is on what happens in the earth.

And during the course of these events, and I think the first rider is in the first part of the seven year period, after the rapture, before the middle of the week, before the covenant is broken, the first rider comes forth and you have this covenant with the many. You have an effort to sustain peace and harmony and prosperity for all, all in human strength, apart from God. This is an echo of Satan saying, I will be like the most high.

I can raise my throne above the stars of God. I can accomplish everything God does. And we don't have to do it God's way, in God's power or with God's life and God's light.

And his representative on earth seeks to prove this on the earth and it fails. And I think at the point that you have the second rider and you have the sword, this is the breaking of the covenant. And the third and the fourth horsemen, this is the last half.

And this looks at the suffering, the death and the hardship that is caused by the failure of human ingenuity, even when it is powered by Satan. Satan himself cannot make things work. He has tried all down through history.

God has given him entire nations and continents and eons of time to show that he can make things work. And instead watch Mel Gibson's Apocalyptic movie where you have pagans trying to run their own show and you've got blood and heads rolling down ziggurats and that's how it always ends. It can never be sustained because of the rot and the malignancy of sin.

And unless you can address sin and be cleansed from it, the wages of sin is death. So now those first four seals basically span from the beginning to close to the end of the entire seven year period. In my understanding.

Now, these are conceptual. You notice this isn't the same guy going back and grabbing a

different horse and riding it. These are conceptual.

These are effects of policies represented by these horsemen. And horsemen were always able to subdue infantry. And so the people who don't have horses are in trouble when the cavalry arrives.

And so this is all done by human power, aided I think by demonic and satanic power, but it fails and it results in death as it always does. It's a reminder to us to not allow sin to remain in our lives. We have to acknowledge it.

We have to confess it. We have to purge it out. We have to change our minds and change our ways.

If we start getting involved in pattern sins and all of us do, figure out how to break the pattern, change the architecture, change the schedule, change how things work, change associations, substitute good habits for bad ones. When a pattern sin starts to rear its head, what are the things that make it easy to fail again? If it's an association with someone, limit that exposure. If it's a particular time of the day, fill that time of day with something else.

Change the structure and pray. Ask God for grace. Ask God for wisdom because only the power of God can break the power of sin.

Remember in, he breaks the power of canceled sin. He sets the prisoners free. Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glory of our God and King, the triumph of his grace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin. We can't break it, he does. It's been canceled, but its power is still alive until we turn to him.

The failure in this period of time is all of the people who have turned to God have left. There will be some converts, but without people that look to God, everyone is looking to one another and their human cooperation and their human ideas. If you see some weird policies being promoted in government and culture and resistance to old ways and old understanding of laws and their enforcement, if you see this happening in our country and all around the world, imagine if there was nobody to resist it.

And that prevailed and that chaos and that self-righteous myopic notion of what is actually right was allowed to rule. Think of what the world would be like. Well, that's what these four seals represent.

But sacrifices on the altar, the blood would run down the sides and pool at the base. And these individuals have been the victims of violent death during this period. And this looks at the entire span.

And conceptually, this is not even so much chronologically as conceptually, the question arises,

those who have turned to God, but they pay for it with their lives, whether targeted or through the failure of policies, and they're caught up in conflicts and they are slain as armies battle each other in the latter half of this period, whether they're killed on purpose or killed as collateral damage, they're God's people. How long, oh, great and mighty Lord, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth. And notice, this can't really be historical because these that have perpetrated their death are currently alive.

All of the martyrs of history, the people who martyred them are also dead. And you can't dig them up and avenge them by killing them or something. There are people who are alive that have taken the lives or been responsible for the loss of life of these individuals.

So it is throughout this seven-year period, and it is looked at in terms of principle. And the answer to the question, if someone were to ask, what about these martyrs? It doesn't mean that they are actually alive and speaking, that they have an interim body and they need a white robe to cover it, and that they need to sit down on a couch and rest. People have read all kinds of things into this.

It's a concept. It is a parable, a metaphor for the need for injustice against people who are God's servants to be reconciled. And they are declared righteous.

The giving of the white robe, they didn't die because they were sin unto death types. And the reconciliation and the vengeance is mine, I will repay phase is yet to come. So there is the need for patience because there will be more injustice.

There will be more killed as they have been killed. So this is a question that arises before the tribulation is over. And there will be an entirety of which these are the first.

Then in the sixth seal in verse 12, there was a great earthquake. The sun became black as sackcloth of hair and the moon became like blood. This is a constant description of the end of the period.

And notice the first five seals were all things on earth. This is now heavenly action. This is stuff that people have no control over and can't be responsible for.

They didn't use too much hairspray and mess up the ozone. And now the moon has turned to blood. This is now divine action taking place at the sixth seal.

And the stars of heaven are falling as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. The sky recedes as a scroll. These are events that are described elsewhere.

And we'll see it when we come back from the break as at the end. So these, you don't have time if the trumpets and the bowls are sequential and successive and take place after all of the seals, there's no time left. By the time the moon turns to blood and the great earthquake the next event is the Lord Jesus writing in, Armageddon is reconciled and the millennial kingdom begins.

There's no time for 14 more events plus whatever happens with the thunders. So this is going to tell us, especially as we move forward, that we have now comprehended from an earthly perspective and looking at earthly consequences, what is going to take place as a result of human attempts to replace God and to replace the Lord Jesus. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're gonna pick up here at the sixth seal and look at those who are sealed in the next chapter and then the opening of the seventh seal. We'll see if we can get that far, but let's pause here and take our break.